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4. TITLE (and Subtitle)	5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED		
6. AUTHOR(s)	7. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER		
8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)	9. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS		
10. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS	11. REPORT DATE		
12. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)	13. NUMBER OF PAGES		
14. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)	15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)		
15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE			
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES			
17. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)			
18. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)			

AD A092534

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AFOSR-TR-80-1052

AD-A092534

POWER TRANSFORMATIONS WHEN THE CHOICE OF POWER IS RESTRICTED TO A FINITE SET

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61102F 2304/A5

Air Force Office of Scientific Research/NM
Bolling AFB, Washington, DC 20332

1980

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DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

Power Transformations, Prediction, Box-Cox Family, Asymptotic Theory, Contiguity

ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

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AFOSR-TR- 80 - 1052

Power Transformations when the Choice of Power
is Restricted to a Finite Set

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Justification	
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Availability Codes	
Dist.	Avail and/or special
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Key Words and Phrases: Power transformations, prediction, Box-Cox
family, asymptotic theory, contiguity.

AMS 1970 Subject Classifications: Primary 62 F 20; Secondary 62 G 35.

Research supported by the US Air Force Office of Scientific Research
under contract AFOSR-80-0080.

Approved for public release;
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Abstract

We study the family of power transformations proposed by Box and Cox (1964) when the choice of the power parameter λ is restricted to a finite set Ω_R . The two cases in which obvious answers obtain are when the true parameter λ is an element of Ω_R and when λ is "far" from Ω_R . We study the case in which λ_0 is "close" to Ω_R , finding that the resulting methods can be very different from unrestricted maximum likelihood and that inference depends on the design, the values of the regression parameters, and the distance of λ to Ω_R .

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This technical report has been reviewed and is approved for public release IAW AFR 190-12 (7b). Distribution is unlimited.

A. D. BLOSE

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1. Introduction

Box and Cox (1964) suggested the power family of transformations, wherein for some unknown λ ,

$$(1.1) \quad y_i^{(\lambda)} = x_i \beta + \sigma \epsilon_i = \tau_i + \sigma \epsilon_i, \quad i=1, \dots, N.$$

Here the design vectors $x_i = (1 \ c_{i2} \ \dots \ c_{ip})'$, $\beta = (\beta_0 \ \dots \ \beta_{p-1})'$, the ϵ_j are independent and identically distributed with mean zero, variance one and distribution F , and

$$\begin{aligned} y^{(\lambda)} &= (y^{(\lambda)} - 1)/\lambda & \lambda \neq 0 \\ &= \log y & \lambda = 0. \end{aligned}$$

They studied both maximum likelihood and Bayes inference when F is the normal distribution. There is now a substantial literature on the problem, an incomplete list of which includes Andrews (1971), Atkinson (1973), Hinkley (1975), Bickel and Doksum (1980, denoted B-D), Carroll (1980), and Carroll and Ruppert (1980, denoted C-R).

B-D developed an asymptotic theory for estimation. If the normal theory MLE is $\hat{\beta}$ when λ is known and $\beta^* = \hat{\beta}(\hat{\lambda})$ when λ is unknown and estimated by $\hat{\lambda}$, they compute the asymptotic distributions of $N^{1/2}(\hat{\beta} - \beta)/\sigma$ and $N^{1/2}(\beta^* - \beta)/\sigma$ as $N \rightarrow \infty$, $\sigma \rightarrow 0$. These distributions are different, with the latter having a covariance matrix at least as large and often very much larger than that of the former; the estimates $\hat{\lambda}$ and β^* are highly variable and highly correlated in general. This suggests that there is a large "cost" due to estimating the power parameter λ . Unfortunately, these results (and independent Monte-Carlo work by Carroll (1980)) suggest that unconditional inference concerning β can be very difficult for, except in certain balanced designs, inference without taking into account the variability of $\hat{\lambda}$ will be incorrect while β^* is itself too variable to be much help. A theory for conditional inference might prove useful.

It is relevant to note that when $\beta=0$ and $\sigma=1$ are known, the curvature (Efron (1975)) for λ at $\lambda=0$ is $\gamma_0^2 = 10.67$; Efron suggests that a value $\gamma_0^2 \geq 1/8$ is "large".

C-R study the prediction problem in the sense of estimating the conditional median of Y given a design point x_0 ; this is inference in the original scale of the data. Their results are much more encouraging; while there is a cost due to estimating λ , it is generally not severe. For example, if $\beta = (\beta_0 \beta_1 \dots \beta_{p-1})'$, the cost averaged over the distribution of the design is $(1+p)^{-1}$ (asymptotically as $N \rightarrow \infty$ and $\sigma \rightarrow 0$).

We are concerned with the following point which has been raised concerning the applicability of the B-D and C-R theories. In practice, one may be uncomfortable using an estimate such as $\hat{\lambda} = .037$, then the much more common log scale ($\hat{\lambda}=0$) is "just as good". Thus it is reasonable to restrict the estimate of λ to a finite set Ω_R and to study the consequences of such a decision. Asymptotically, as $N \rightarrow \infty$ but λ and Ω_R stay fixed, one has the trivial results that if $\lambda \in \Omega_R$ one is almost always in the right scale so there are no difficulties, while if $\lambda \notin \Omega_R$ bias dominates and no useful results are obtainable.

In Table 1 we present the results of a Monte-Carlo study for estimating the conditional median of Y given x_0 . The model is simple linear regression based on a uniform design with $\beta_0=5$, $\beta_1=2$ and

$$(1.2) \quad N^{-1} \sum_{i=1}^N x_i' x_i = I_2.$$

The errors were normally distributed with mean 0 and variance σ^2 , and there were 500 replications of the experiment. The restricted power set was $\Omega_R = \{0, \pm 1/2, \pm 1\}$, and we made decisions in this set on the basis of the likelihood. For a given $\hat{\lambda}$, our estimator is

$$(1.3) \quad \begin{aligned} & (1 + \hat{\lambda} x_0 \beta^*)^{1/\hat{\lambda}} & (\hat{\lambda} \neq 0) \\ & \exp(x_0 \beta^*) & (\hat{\lambda} = 0) \end{aligned}$$

The numbers listed in the Table 1 are the "relative mean square errors (MSE)", i.e., the mean square error of (1.3) divided by the MSE when λ is known. We list results for the origin $x_0 = (1 \ 0)$ and

when x_0 is a randomly chosen number of the design; the latter is in effect an average relative MSE over the distribution of the design.

In Table 1 we see that the restricted estimator (RE) dominates the MLE when $\lambda=0$ (hence $\lambda \in \Omega_R$), while the MLE dominates when $\lambda \notin \Omega_R$. In this latter case note that increasing N or decreasing σ results in improved performance of the MLE relative to the RE.

In Table 2 we repeat the above experiment with the changes $\beta_0=7$, $\beta_1=4$. The slightly worse behavior of the MLE relative to the λ -known case is expected from the C-R theory. Note here that the change in parameter values causes the RE to be much worse than the MLE if $\lambda \notin \Omega_R$. Also, the effect of changing N or σ is highlighted.

From the Monte-Carlo, we see that the performance of the RE relative to the MLE depends on λ , N , σ and β . One purpose of the rest of this paper is to propose and investigate a simple theory which gives a somewhat more systematic understanding of this performance. More generally, we also investigate the question of the feasibility of constructing procedures for which the choice of λ is restricted but which also give performance comparable to the MLE.

Table 1

The MSE behavior of the MLE and RE relative to the λ -known estimate of the conditional median of Y given x_0 . Here $\Omega_R = \{0, \pm 1/2, \pm 1\}$, $\beta_0 = 5$ and $\beta_1 = 2$.

			ORIGIN ($x_0 = (0 \ 1)$)			AVERAGE (x_0 random member of design)		
N	σ	λ	MLE	RE	Ratio (High/Low)	MLE	RE	RATIO
20	1	0	1.17	1.05	1.11	1.07	1.01	1.06
20	1/2		1.28	1.18	1.08	1.17	1.01	1.16
40	1		1.13	1.00	1.13	1.08	1.00	1.08
40	1/2	0	1.22	1.00	1.22	1.16	1.00	1.16
20	1	1/8	1.13	1.26	1.12	1.07	1.15	1.07
20	1/2		1.25	1.43	1.14	1.13	1.24	1.10
40	1		1.12	1.29	1.15	1.03	1.10	1.07
40	1/2	1/8	1.25	1.53	1.22	1.05	1.24	1.18
20	1	1/4	1.12	1.17	1.04	1.06	1.10	1.04
20	1/2		1.24	1.34	1.08	1.12	1.24	1.11
40	1		1.10	1.29	1.17	1.04	1.10	1.06
40	1/2	1/4	1.23	1.52	1.24	1.06	1.14	1.08

Table 2

The MSE behavior of the MLE and RE relative to the λ -known estimate of the conditional median of Y given x_0 . Here $\Omega_R = \{0, \pm 1/2, \pm 1\}$, $\beta_0 = 7$ and $\beta_1 = 4$.

N	σ	λ	ORIGEN ($x_0 = (0 \ 1)$)			AVERAGE (x_0 random member of design)		
			MLE	RE	Ratio (High/Low)	MLE	RE	RATIO
20	1	0	1.34	1.00	1.34	1.25	1.00	1.25
20	1/2	0	1.43	1.00	1.43	1.27	1.00	1.27
40	1	0	1.23	1.00	1.23	1.32	1.00	1.32
40	1/2	0	1.37	1.00	1.37	1.27	1.00	1.27
20	1	1/8	1.25	1.72	1.38	1.15	1.61	1.40
20	1/2	1/8	1.37	2.24	1.64	1.18	2.30	1.95
40	1	1/8	1.24	1.80	1.45	1.04	1.59	1.53
40	1/2	1/8	1.38	2.47	1.79	1.07	2.33	2.18
20	1	1/4	1.24	1.65	1.33	1.13	1.49	1.32
20	1/2	1/4	1.36	2.52	1.85	1.16	2.19	1.89
40	1	1/4	1.22	2.11	1.73	1.05	1.42	1.35
40	1/2	1/4	1.36	3.41	2.51	1.09	2.20	2.02

2. A large sample theory

Any reasonable theory must have λ "close" to Ω_R for large sample sizes. We choose to do this by letting the cardinality of Ω_R increase with increasing sample size N and by letting $\lambda = \lambda_N$ converge to a fixed element of Ω_R . For ease of calculation we focus on the important special case that the log scale is "almost" correct, i.e., Ω_R always contains zero and

$$\lambda = b\sigma/N^{1/2}.$$

Of course, when $b = 0$ the data truly have a log-normal distribution.

Let $\hat{\lambda}_R$ and $\hat{\lambda}_M$ denote the restricted and ML estimates of λ , let $\hat{\beta}_R$ or β^* be the estimate of β having chosen the power $\hat{\lambda}_R$ or $\hat{\lambda}_M$, and let

$$\begin{aligned} f(\lambda, x_0 \beta) &= (1 + \lambda x_0 \beta)^{1/\lambda} & (\lambda \neq 0) \\ &= \exp(x_0 \beta) & (\lambda = 0), \end{aligned}$$

which is the conditional median of Y given x_0 , with estimate (1.2). We assume the errors are normally distributed. Letting $e = (1 \ 0 \ \dots \ 0)$, we assume

$$\begin{aligned} \underline{x}_i' e' &= 1 & (\text{there is an intercept}) \\ N^{-1} \sum \underline{x}_i' \underline{x}_i &= I : \end{aligned}$$

Then, for any value of b , when λ is known the limit MSE is

$$(2.2) \quad \text{MSE}(\lambda \text{ known}) = \|\underline{x}_0\|^2 \exp(2 \underline{x}_0 \beta).$$

For fixed σ the computations are very difficult, so we will follow the lead of Bickel and Doksum and consider only the case that $\sigma = \Gamma \eta$, where $\Gamma = \Gamma(N) \rightarrow 0$ is a known sequence; it simplifies notation to make the convention $\eta = 1$.

We are now in a position to define the restricted estimate $\hat{\lambda}_R$ of λ , which we take by convention to satisfy $|\hat{\lambda}_R| \leq 1$. Let $\mathcal{D} = \{d_k\}$ be a finite or countably infinite subset of the extended real line with $d_0 = 0$, $d_{-k} = -d_k$, and $\sup\{d_k\} = \infty$. Define intervals midway between these points:

$$B_k = \left[(d_{k-1} + d_k)/2, (d_k + d_{k+1})/2 \right].$$

Our restricted estimate $\hat{\lambda}_R$ satisfies $|\hat{\lambda}_R| \leq 1$ and maximizes the likelihood over the admissible set with $N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_R / \Gamma \in \mathcal{D}$.

Asymptotically, the procedure becomes

Choose $N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_R / \Gamma = d_k$ if $N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_M / \Gamma \in B_k$ and $|\hat{\lambda}_R| \leq 1$.

If not possible, choose $\hat{\lambda}_R = \pm 1$ on the basis of the likelihood.

The resulting estimate of β is $\hat{\beta}_R$ and the estimate of the conditional median of Y given x_0 is $f(\hat{\lambda}_R, x_0 \hat{\beta}_R)$.

The above procedure is asymptotically the same as a restricted maximum likelihood method and is quite intuitive as it chooses the point in \mathcal{D} closest to $N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_M / \Gamma$. Note also that as N increases, the number of possible choices for scale also increases, as desired. Make the definitions:

$$q_N = N^{-1} \sum_{i=1}^N \tau_i^2 x_i \rightarrow q$$

$$a_1 = [x_0 q' - (x_0 \beta)^2] / 2$$

$$c_N = (-\tau_1^2 / 2 \dots -\tau_N^2 / 2)$$

$$x_N' = (x_1' \dots x_N')$$

$$e_N = (1/4) \{ N^{-1} \sum_{i=1}^N \tau_i^4 - \|q_N\|^2 \} \rightarrow e_0 > 0.$$

Theorem. Using the B-D asymptotics, the limit distribution of the restricted estimator of the conditional median

$$(2.1) \quad N^{1/2} \left[f(\hat{\lambda}_R, \hat{x}_0, \hat{\beta}_R) - f(\lambda = b\sigma/N^{1/2}, x_0, \beta) \right]$$

is given by

$$(2.2) \quad \exp(x_0 \beta) \left[\|x_0\| Z_1 + a_1 \sum_k (d_k - b) I(c_0^{-1/2} Z_2 + b \in B_k) \right],$$

where Z_1 and Z_2 are independent standard normal random variables. The proof is in the appendix.

The Theorem shows that the estimate of the conditional median of Y given x_0 based on a restricted choice of λ is not necessarily asymptotically normally distributed.

Example #1. Suppose that for any sample size we restrict our choice of $\hat{\lambda}_R$ to a fixed set, say

$$\Omega_R = \{0, \pm 1/2, \pm 1\}.$$

In this case we eventually have $\hat{\lambda}_R = 0$ so that $\mathcal{D} = \{0, \pm \infty\}$ and

(2.3) MSE (fixed finite set)

$$\rightarrow \exp(2 x_0 \beta) \left[\|x_0\|^2 + b^2 a_1^2 \right].$$

In simple linear regression with a symmetric design and fourth moment μ_4 satisfying (1.2), we find that at the origin $x_0 = (1, 0)$, $a_1^2 = \beta_1^4/4$ and $c_0 = \beta_1^4(\mu_4 - 1)/4$. In this case, while (2.3) does not serve as a very good method for predicting the individual values in Tables 1 and 2, it does, however, lead to the following qualitative conclusions, all of which are satisfied by the simulations:

(i) Changing the value of N from 20 to 40 while fixing Ω_R and λ basically increase b by a factor of $\sqrt{2}$. Hence, larger values of N will result in a worse performance for the RE when $\lambda \notin \Omega_R$.

(ii) Changing σ from 1 to $1/2$ increases b by a factor of 2 and should result in worse performance for the RE.

(iii) Changing p_1 from 2 to 4 increases the term β_1^4 by a factor of sixteen. Such a large change should cause much worse performance in Table 2.

(iv) The increase in (iii) above should make the changes in the RE when one changes N or σ much more dramatic in Table 2 than in Table 1.

Example #2. The theory includes the MLE $\hat{\lambda}_M$ by choosing \mathcal{V} dense. In this case we get

(2.4a) MSE (MLE of λ)

$$+ \exp(2x_0\beta) \left[\|x_0\|^2 + a_1^2/e_0 \right] .$$

In the simple linear regression, at the origin this becomes

$$(2.4b) \quad \exp(2\beta_0) \left[1 + (u_4-1)^{-1} \right] .$$

Note that (2.4b) is independent of the value of b .

Example #3. An interesting example in which the number of possible values of $\hat{\lambda}_R$ increases with N occurs when $\mathcal{V} = \{\text{all integers}\}$. It is not too unreasonable to suspect that this restricted estimate will be at least comparable to the MLE, perhaps somewhat better when $b=0$ and hence $\lambda \in \Omega_R$, but not too much worse when $b = 1/2$ and $\lambda \notin \Omega_R$. In this case

(2.5) MSE (restricted procedure)

$$+ \exp(2x_0\beta) \left[\|x_0\|^2 + (a_1^2 e_0^{-1}) \sum_k (k-b)^2 e_0 P\{e_0^{-1/2}Z + b \in B_k\} \right] .$$

The only important difference between (2.4a) and (2.5) is the term

$$\sum_k (k-b)^2 e_0 P\{e_0^{-1/2}Z + b \in B_k\} .$$

In Table 3 we compare the values of (2.4b) and (2.5) for the uniform simple linear regression design of the introduction with $\mu_4 = 1.79$; all comparisons are at the origin $x_0 = (1 \ 0)$.

Table 3

Comparison of MSE for a simple linear regression design with moments $\mu_1 = \mu_3 = 0$, $\mu_2 = 1$, $\mu_4 = 1.79$, $x_0 = (1 \ 0)$

b	β_1	MSE(MLE)	MSE(RE)	MSE(RE)
		MSE(λ known)	MSE(λ known)	MSE(MLE)
0	1.5	2.27	2.37	1.04
0	2.0	2.27	2.59	1.14
0	4.0	2.27	1.03	.45
1/2	1.5	2.27	2.37	1.04
1/2	2.0	2.27	2.61	1.15
1/2	4.0	2.27	129.42	57.01

The results are somewhat surprising. First note that the case $b=0$ corresponds to situations in which λ truly belongs to the set Ω_R . The restricted estimate does not always outperform the MLE, although it does for large β_1 . What is even more interesting is the case $b=1/2$, which is one of the simplest cases in which λ is not in the set Ω_R although it is quite close. Here we see that the restricted procedure can perform very badly indeed.

Tables 1-3 and the Theorem thus suggest that if the number of possible choices of scale is only on the order of $N^{1/2}$, the performance of the resulting estimates will differ from estimates based on the MLE of λ , in some cases being better but in others being very much worse. If one has no prior belief or evidence that only a finite number of values of λ are possible, but rather in estimating the conditional median of Y given x_0 one wants to make only "reasonable" choices of λ while retaining MLE-type behavior, the number of possible choices of λ will have to be

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Appendix

We will use contiguity techniques (Hajek and Sidak (1978)). Let L_1 be the log-likelihood when $b=0$ and let L_2 be the log-likelihood for fixed $b \neq 0$. Somewhat detailed calculations show that as $N \rightarrow \infty$, $\sigma \rightarrow 0$, under the distribution L_1 with $\lambda = 0$,

$$(A.1) \quad -(L_2 - L_1) = (b^2/8N) \sum_{i=1}^N \tau_i^4 + (bN^{-1/2}) \sum_{i=1}^N \epsilon_i \tau_i^2/2 + o_p(1).$$

This shows that the case $b \neq 0$ is contiguous to the case $b=0$.

Proof of the Theorem: When $\lambda = b = 0$ it follows by a Taylor expansion in λ_R that as $N \rightarrow \infty$, $\sigma \rightarrow 0$

$$(A.2) \quad S_N = N^{1/2} \left[f(\hat{\lambda}_R, \hat{\beta}_R) - f(\lambda=0, \beta) \right] \exp(-x_0' \beta) \\ = N^{-1/2} \sum_{i=1}^N x_0 x_i' \epsilon_i + a_1 N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_R / \sigma + o_p(1).$$

Also, B-D show that when $\lambda = 0$,

$$(A.3) \quad 2e_0 N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_M / \sigma = N^{-1/2} \sum_{i=1}^N (\tau_i^2 - x_i' q') \epsilon_i + o_p(1).$$

It is easy to check that the r.h.s. of (A.3) is asymptotically independent of the first term on the r.h.s. of (A.2). We now use the definition of $\hat{\lambda}_R$ and the convention $\sigma = r(N)\eta = r(N)$ to obtain that when $\lambda = 0$, as $N \rightarrow \infty$ and $\sigma \rightarrow 0$,

$$(A.4) \quad S_N = N^{-1/2} \sum_{i=1}^N x_0 x_i' \epsilon_i + a_1 \sum_k d_k I(N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_M / \sigma \in B_k) + o_p(1).$$

We are now in a position to use Theorem 7.2 of Roussas (1972, page 38). In his notation,

$$(A.5) \quad T_N' = N^{-1/2} \sum_{i=1}^N (x_0 x_i' \epsilon_i \quad q x_i' \epsilon_i \quad \tau_i^2 \epsilon_i) \\ \Gamma = E T_N T_N' \\ h' = (0 \quad 0 \quad -b/2).$$

One can show that the terms in (A.5) satisfy the conditions of Roussas' Theorem 7.2 so that when $\lambda = b \sigma N^{-1/2}$, as $N \rightarrow \infty$ and $\sigma \rightarrow 0$, T_N is asymptotically normally distributed with mean Γh and covariance Γ . Because of (A.3), this means that $N^{1/2} \hat{\lambda}_M / \sigma$ and the first term on the r.h.s. of (A.2) are, when $\lambda = b \sigma N^{-1/2}$, jointly asymptotically normally distributed with means $(h - b x_0 q/2)$, variances $(c_0^{-1}, \|x_0\|^2)$ and zero covariance. From this we obtain that (2.1) is asymptotically distributed with the same distribution as

$$\|x_0\| Z_1 - b a_1 + a_1 \sum_k d_k (c_0^{-1/2} Z_2 + b \in B_k) ,$$

where Z_1 and Z_2 are as in the Theorem. This completes the proof. □